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# General Assembly
Fifty-eighth session

*Official Records*

**37**th plenary meeting
Monday, 20 October 2003, 10 a.m.
New York

*President:* The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

**Agenda item 8** ***(continued)***

**Adoption of the agenda and organization of work**

**Letter from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences (A/58/356/Add.1)**

**The President:** The Assembly will now turn its attention to document A/58/356/Add.1, which contains a letter dated 13 October 2003 from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences addressed to the President of the Assembly. Members are aware that, pursuant to section I, paragraph 7, of Assembly resolution 40/243, no subsidiary organ of the General Assembly may meet at United Nations Headquarters during the main part of a regular session of the Assembly unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly.

Authorization is thus sought for the subsidiary organ cited in the letter, on the strict understanding that meetings would have to be accommodated within available facilities and services.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to authorize the subsidiary organ of the Assembly listed in the letter of the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences to meet during the main part of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly?

*It was so decided.*

**Agenda item 12**

**Report of the Economic and Social Council (A/58/3 (Part I))**

**The President:** I give the floor to the President of the Economic and Social Council, His Excellency Mr. Gert Rosenthal, to introduce the report of the Economic and Social Council.

**Mr. Rosenthal** (*spoke in Spanish*): It gives me great pleasure to introduce the report of the Economic and Social Council for 2003, circulated in a preliminary version under symbol A/58/3.

The United Nations Charter establishes a clear relationship between the General Assembly and the Council, and, as main organs of the Organization, we work together in multiple ways. But in the past year, two new avenues of cooperation have opened up, which will surely lead to a much stronger relationship in the future. I refer, first, to the joint role that the Monterrey Consensus assigns to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in follow-up activities to the International Conference on Financing for Development. Secondly, I refer to General Assembly resolution 57/270 B, adopted in June of this year, which confirmed the central role of the Economic and Social Council in promoting an integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up of decisions adopted at major United Nations summits and conferences in the economic and social spheres.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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Document A/58/3 presents a broad vision of Economic and Social Council activities during this calendar year. I would like to highlight those aspects that I find to be of special significance.

First, I would like to mention the Economic and Social Council high-level joint meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization (WTO), held on 14 April. This was the first fully reconstituted meeting after Monterrey. As such, it featured significant innovations both in its preparations and its format, to enable it to fulfil its new specific role in the follow-up to the conference. Preparations involved extensive consultations within the Council and with the management of the Bretton Woods institutions, the WTO, and the executive directors of the World Bank. Informal hearings with members of civil society and the business sector were also held in March 2003.

I am very pleased with the outcome of the meeting, both in form and in substance. As to form, we were able to attract a very high level of intergovernmental representation of the main multilateral stakeholders, including the Chairman of the Development Committee. A representative of the WTO intergovernmental machinery participated in the meeting for the first time since the spring meetings were initiated in 1998. The President of the General Assembly also participated, as did a significant number of executive directors of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Also attending were members of the community of non-governmental organizations and the business sector.

On the substance, we had a very productive interactive dialogue on the progress achieved and the obstacles encountered in the application of the commitments contained in the Monterrey Consensus. In summary, this yearly gathering strengthened the intergovernmental cooperation of the Council with its key counterparts in Washington and Geneva. The discussions also focused increasingly on major themes in the Monterrey Consensus, which proved very productive.

When the high-level dialogue of the Assembly on financing for development meets on 29 October, it will be able to build on the discussions of the Economic and Social Council joint meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO. The outcome of the spring meeting is reflected in the summary of the President, which was welcomed by the Council at its substantive session.

Let me now turn to the outcome of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council. As I have already stated, I feel that 2003 has been a successful year for the Council, and one rich in innovations.

First, the Economic and Social Council responded well to its crucial role in examining development policies during its high-level segment. The segment focused mainly on promoting an integrated approach to rural development in developing countries for poverty eradication and sustainable development. The Council gave important policy directions on how rural development could best help achieve the medium-term goals and other internationally agreed development goals. It also called for a new integrated approach to rural development, one that built on major United Nations conferences and summits since Rio, bringing together the social, economic and environmental dimensions of development. The ministerial declaration adopted by the Council highlighted the fundamental impact of international cooperation and market access on rural development.

The focus of the Council's ministerial declaration on a multi-sectoral approach and on partnerships was mirrored in the attendance at that segment. Heads of United Nations agencies, ministers and policymakers from various sectors joined with non-governmental organizations and business sector representatives in the debate, round tables and related events. A United Nations public-private alliance was launched in response to the ministerial declaration. This alliance encourages business approaches that promote economic and social advancement and profitable investment in rural areas, starting with Madagascar as the first pilot country. It can be said generally that the Economic and Social Council put rural development back on the international agenda after a period of relative neglect by Governments and their development partners.

The Council also exercised with renewed dynamism its role in development cooperation. The operational activities segment is becoming a meeting place for the world of development cooperation. A select and influential mix of policymakers, bilateral cooperation agencies representatives of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee,

the United Nations, its funds and programmes and its country teams and civil society gathered in Geneva. There were panels that were able to carry out exceptionally frank discussions on difficult issues, such as the lessons learned from the United Nations system's evaluations of its activities and, crucially, the funding situation of United Nations development organizations. Many innovative ideas emerged. Reflection on budgeting of financial resources might also contribute to the follow-up to the Monterrey Conference. This dialogue will continue as we prepare for the triennial comprehensive policy review on operational activities for development that the General Assembly will conduct next year. The resolution adopted by the segment also contains detailed guidance for preparing that review.

This year's humanitarian affairs segment was also one of the best, since the segment was created as part of the first phase of the Secretary-General's reform. Panels also brought new ideas to the table on issues such as the transition from relief to development, humanitarian financing and HIV/AIDS-related emergencies. For example, considerable attention was paid to the high risks involved in transition and to the need for flexible transitional funding mechanisms that would enable the simultaneous financing of relief and development. Member States reached agreement on an action-oriented resolution, which is now being followed up by the humanitarian agencies. The resolution contains a new and ambitious agenda on humanitarian financing for the humanitarian community, as well as for the donors and recipients.

At its coordination segment, the Council built on the recently adopted General Assembly resolution on the coordinated implementation of conferences. The Council decided to undertake informal consultations, starting next year, to develop a multi-year programme for its coordination segment. As Members know, the Assembly has decided that the Economic and Social Council should review the progress made in implementing conferences annually by focusing on a common cross-sectoral thematic issue at its coordination segment. At its next session, the Economic and Social Council will continue to reflect on how best to implement the decisions of the Assembly on this issue.

The Council has added a new dimension to its work over the past year through the creation of ad hoc advisory groups on African countries emerging from conflict, for which the guidelines of the General Assembly were followed. Members will recall that resolution 55/217, on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, had requested the Economic and Social Council to consider creating such groups with a view to assessing the needs of the country's concerned and elaborating a long-term programme of support. The Council created two of these groups — one on Guinea-Bissau in 2002 and the other on Burundi in 2003, at the request of the respective countries' authorities.

That initiative, although recent, has proven to be a useful tool to gather major development partners, including the United Nations system, the Bretton Woods institutions and donors to study jointly the needs of these countries. The groups promote a broad approach to problems related to the transition and the recovery process and to avoid a relapse into conflict. I trust that by so doing, the groups will contribute to this comprehensive approach to conflict prevention and post-conflict peace-building, as requested by the Assembly.

During the general segment, the Economic and Social Council held a meeting with the Chairpersons of all its functional commissions. Constructive proposals emerged from this session, particularly with a view to improving coordination among the commissions.

I have made some suggestions to the members of the Economic and Social Council on how we can improve our oversight and management of the Council's subsidiary bodies. We will discuss these suggestions more fully when the substantive session reconvenes. Of course, we look at this process within the context of the broader reform launched by the Secretary-General.

Several other important decisions were made. For example, the Council provided guidance on the preparation of the General Assembly high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS, held on 22 September. The Council paved the way for the General Assembly to admit a new specialized agency into the United Nations family by approving a draft relationship agreement with the World Tourism Organization. This new specialized agency can make an important contribution, particularly as we search for innovative ways to mobilize resources for the development of poor countries. The Council also reviewed the work of its

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Task Force. The Task Force, created in response to Economic and Social Council work on ICT in 2000, is well positioned to continue to promote ICT policies for development and to contribute to the preparations for the two phases of the World Summit on the Information Society.

The Economic and Social Council further reviewed the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries. It sent a strong message that progress must be accelerated. It will devote its high-level segment next year to resource mobilization and the creation of an enabling environment for poverty reduction in the framework of the implementation of the Programme of Action. The discussion will continue during the coordination segment, which will have as one of its themes the work of the United Nations system on rural development, with due consideration being given to the least developed countries. I hope that all the Members United Nations and all parts of the United Nations system will take an active part in preparing for the high-level segment. More than an event, it should be the culmination of an intense preparatory process, and lead to concrete advances for the least developed countries. The theme of the segment — the least developed countries — will also help the Council to establish a closer link with the African Union summit meeting.

The coordination segment in 2004 will also review the implementation of the Economic and Social Council's agreed conclusions of 1997 on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system. I hope that United Nations system agencies will consider that to be a target date for the achievement of concrete results in mainstreaming gender in their work.

In conclusion, the Economic and Social Council has carried out extensive and productive work in the discharge of its coordination and oversight functions and policies. I can affirm with confidence that the Council is gaining both in effectiveness and in vitality in its role as the central strategic body in the United Nations system for promoting policy coherence and strengthening system-wide cooperation to achieve our common goals. We have come a long way, although we still have some distance to go to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. The progress we have made thus far, however, encourages me to end my statement on an optimistic note: we are moving in the right direction.

**Mr. Bennouna** (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): Ambassador Rosenthal, President of the Economic and Social Council, has just given us a comprehensive briefing on the work done by that body, particularly on the substantive session in Geneva. As Chairman of the Group of 77 and China, my country participated actively during that meeting and contributed to its successful outcome. We fully agree with Mr. Rosenthal's comments and conclusions, and I congratulate him and the Vice-Presidents on their work.

Ambassador Rosenthal has sought to revitalize the Economic and Social Council — an important Charter organ — and I believe that he should be able to feel a sense of satisfaction in his work in promoting the essential functions of that organ.

I should like to recall — and this point has been made before — that in the economic and social field it is the Council that is mandated by the Charter to provide coherence to the work done by the United Nations system — the family of the United Nations: all of the agencies and bodies working in specialized fields, which, unfortunately, sometimes lack the holistic vision that is necessary, particularly in today's globalized world. I believe that today it is the Economic and Social Council that must carry out that work, which is much more complex now than when the Charter was adopted.

I would like to take this opportunity to say that the work that General Assembly President Hunte is currently carrying out to revitalize the activities of the General Assembly, so as to modernize it and help it to confront the challenges of the twenty-first century, must be accompanied by the reform of the Economic and Social Council, so that that body can provide guidelines to all of the specialized agencies. Work is under way, but it has not yet been completed and must continue.

The Group of 77 participated actively in what is called the operational activities segment of Economic and Social Council. Operational activities are all of the activities of the system that make it possible for us to act in the developing countries — the poor countries — to promote development and reduce poverty. Within the Economic and Social Council we have noted that all of the developed countries are willing to give more

weight to those operational activities. But in order for us to give them more importance, secure predictable financial resources must be made available to enable the United Nations system to discharge its work in the field. Clearly — this is no secret — these resources are currently insufficient. It could even be said that it is hard to imagine that an organization such as the United Nations Development Programme should have only some $700 million annually to help all of the poor countries in the world.

Of course there is expertise and certain donor activities that need to be legitimized, but these resources are not enough. We therefore await with great interest the report that will be provided by the Secretary-General to be submitted at the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly on the question of financing operational activities, as well as the triennial policy review that is set for that time. We hope that by next year a substantive debate will take place on financing for development.

We also take note with satisfaction of the work done by the Economic and Social Council at its second segment, the humanitarian segment. The resolution adopted by the Economic and Social Council this year strengthens coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance provided by the various stakeholders within the United Nations system. The report of the Secretary-General to the Economic and Social Council and to the General Assembly will reflect progress made in the follow-up to Council resolution 2003/5, and we hope that in this manner we will be able to make progress in strengthening the coordination of the entire United Nations system in the humanitarian field.

Speaking of the humanitarian field, I would like to say how shaken we were by the tragedy that occurred in Iraq on 19 August 2003, which cost the lives of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello and a number of worthy staff members of the United Nations and which requires us to be even more vigilant in coordinating our work in the humanitarian field and in the safety and security that must be given to all United Nations staff members.

I will mention another matter we are particularly concerned with and where I think we have made a major contribution. That is the question of the integrated follow-up and implementation of commitments undertaken at major United Nations conferences since the Millennium Declaration was adopted in 2000, including the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the International Conference on Financing for Development, as well as the World Trade Organization (WTO) conference in Doha on international trade.

As you know, the adoption by the General Assembly in June 2003, of resolution 57/270 B was a major achievement which will be discussed in the Second Committee as well as in plenary meetings. We do hope that in 2005, which is in two years time, we will have a summit meeting on development that will assess the progress made in poverty reduction and education in poor countries. Furthermore, we hope there will be interesting mechanisms to follow up the financing for development, as they were envisaged at Monterrey.

It is impossible to resolve the issue of financing for development unless there is a dialogue between our Organization, the United Nations in New York and the Bretton Woods institutions located in Washington, D.C., including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In spring 2003, Economic and Social Council President Rosenthal moved this dialogue forward. We had a very interesting session here in New York, but we want to move beyond mere intellectual discussion so that together we may draft operational programmes. We believe, and I speak on behalf of the G-77, that the World Bank and the IMF need the United Nations and the United Nations needs the IMF and the World Bank for the same reasons. This dialogue therefore needs to take place as soon as possible.

For this reason, the Economic and Social Council needs to move forward with its mission in this area, the goal being the implementation of the commitments undertaken in Monterrey. On 29 October 2003 there will be a high level dialogue on financing for development with the participation of the finance ministers. Here again, we hope this will provide an opportunity to move this major question forward.

I now come to one question mentioned by the President of the Council — the question of the least developed countries, the poorest of the poor. The President has just reminded us that the Council decided to devote next year, through a high level debate, to the question of helping to fund the least developed countries and helping to implement the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, which was

adopted in 2001 by the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, held in Brussels.

The G-77 and China would like to take this opportunity once again to appeal to all donor countries and all multilateral organizations to redouble their efforts in order to implement the commitments they undertook to assist the least developed countries towards growth and development.

We hope we will be able to participate actively at the Economic and Social Council meeting on the least developed countries next year and that we will be able to advance implementation of the Brussels programme of action. The meeting that took place in Geneva this year showed, unfortunately, that the Brussels Programme of Action has not made much progress. I think we must draw that conclusion and, therefore, if the Brussels Programme made no progress, it was because there was a lack of adequate political will to help it move forward.

As Chairman of the G-77, Morocco has made the cause of the least developed countries one of its top priorities; that is why we held a ministerial meeting on the least developed countries in Rabat this year.

One of the last points, which was central to the Economic and Social Council debates in Geneva, was the subject of rural development in the developing countries and the question of agriculture and the countryside. I participated in the round tables and plenary meetings concerning rural development and it was a very high quality debate. Not only did the representatives of Governments take part, but also prominent people from civil society and stakeholders from the countries concerned. Obstacles to rural development were identified and some possible solutions were proposed. I wish to recall that the obstacles to rural development continue to include access to the markets of the developed countries, including agricultural product markets from the poor countries to the developed countries.

The irregular subsidies that the wealthy countries continue to provide to their agricultural producers ultimately threatens to ruin the agricultural sector in the poor countries. The cotton scandal is well known and was in fact brought up at the Cancún meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in September. That meeting left us greatly frustrated because the position of the developing countries was unfortunately not heard. But we hope that the dialogue will be resumed. A ministerial WTO declaration was adopted at Geneva, and we truly hope that it will enable us to redouble efforts to promote the agricultural products of the developing world. As is well known, development and growth begin with agriculture.

Finally, allow me to recall a number of problems that return every year: the lack of direct foreign investment, the instability of commodity markets and the terrible debt burden. They prevent rural development in the developing countries.

In conclusion, the Group of 77 and China expresses once again its gratitude to the President of the Economic and Social Council and his team and to all who have contributed to the success of the Economic and Social Council's substantive session in Geneva. We hope that the Council will also benefit from the encouraging positive wind of reform blowing at the United Nations, which was reflected in the interventions of all the heads of State or Government during the present session of the General Assembly.

**Mr. Spatafora** (Italy): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The acceding countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia have aligned themselves with this statement.

The European Union holds that the revitalization and reinforcement of the Economic and Social Council's role to be of the utmost importance. This objective, reaffirmed by the heads of State and Government in the Millennium Declaration three years ago, and at the recent ministerial segment of the general debate, needs to be vigorously pursued. We welcome the progress made in strengthening the Council's role. At the same time, we believe that much remains to be done to give the Economic and Social Council its rightful role in the United Nation system, as it has evolved since its inception. Here, I would like to say that we fully share and support what Ambassador Bennouna has just said about the need for the revitalization exercise — the rethinking and strengthening exercise — to apply not only to the General Assembly but also to the Economic and Social Council. I fully support and share that belief as a representative of the European Union and of Italy.

The European Union would like to highlight some of the major areas in which the role of the Economic and Social Council can be strengthened.

First, with respect to reinforcing the system-wide coordination role, the European Union is encouraged by the outcome of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the outcomes of the major conferences, as reflected in resolution 57/270 B.

There is broad consensus on the pivotal role of the Economic and Social Council in system-wide coordination and in promoting the integrated, coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the major United Nations conferences and summits and in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. This will allow the Council to assume the responsibilities invested in it by the Millennium Summit, the Monterrey Consensus, the Johannesburg Summit and all the conferences and special sessions of the General Assembly throughout the 1990s. We welcome the decision by the Economic and Social Council in Geneva last July to finalize the list of cross-cutting themes and the multi-year work programme before its next substantive session in 2004.

At the same time, we consider the activities of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council to be of the utmost importance. They can inject great vitality into United Nations debates and activities, as demonstrated by the outcome of the recent eleventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The Commission's new path shows how innovation can lead to better targeted and more productive actions. Such actions keep the United Nations at the focus of the initiatives and attention of Governments, civil society and other stakeholders. To that end, openness to innovation in identifying the most effective and result-oriented work methods is a must. Emphasis must be placed on result-oriented rather than debate-oriented work. That is the way forward. The General Assembly has asked the various commissions to continue to review their methods. We have high hopes for the results that this process will deliver.

In his report on the coordination segment of the Economic and Social Council (E/2003/67), the Secretary-General indicated areas that deserve more attention. In particular, we agree with the Secretary-General's suggestion to focus on the relationship between the Economic and Social Council and the regional commissions and on the need to build a closer relationship with specialized agencies and inter-agency bodies to ensure consistency and coherence in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. What we need is to ensure coherence and consistency. Ambassador Bennouna emphasized that aspect, as well.

The Secretary-General has suggested that

> "the role of the Economic and Social Council — and the role of the United Nations as a whole in economic and social affairs, including its relationship to the Bretton Woods institutions — needs to be rethought and reinvigorated". (*A/58/PV.7, p. 4*)

The European Union believes that the relationship between the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions and World Trade Organization has improved substantially: the preparatory process of the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development showed the tremendous potential for a relationship among different organizations working within their mandates to achieve a common outcome. We must work hard to keep up that spirit, using that type of methodology to implement our common agenda for development. However, I have to say that we have not yet achieved the level of synergy and cooperation that should be expected. We need to ensure greater coherence and consistency in that area, as well.

The enhancement of the role of the Economic and Social Council largely depends on its ability to address issues of major relevance to Governments and public opinion. The membership has a great responsibility in establishing the themes on which we have to focus our action since they are the outcome of a negotiated process. At the same time, we must not refrain from allowing the Economic and Social Council to be more pro-active on important issues, convening ad hoc meetings whenever justified by the issue's relevance. As an example, the Economic and Social Council could, if needed, devote more of its work to country-specific situations or crises.

The humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council last July highlighted another area in which more action is needed. The Council plays a major role in strengthening the coordination of United Nations emergency humanitarian assistance. In that respect, Assembly resolution 57/270 B gives clear guidance to all stakeholders.

The European Union believes that humanitarian assistance should be provided in ways that support recovery and long-term development and promote self-reliance among affected populations and sustainability

of humanitarian efforts. In complex emergencies a sound transitional phase and well-coordinated and appropriately sequenced relief and development interventions can help prevent the recurrence of conflicts, which should also be an objective. In welcoming the United Nations work in this area, we believe that the Economic and Social Council must continue to focus on the challenges of the transition from relief to development.

As for post-conflict situations, the European Union is pleased by the establishment of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on African Countries emerging from conflict. The first experience with Guinea-Bissau and the recent establishment of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Burundi show that opportunities exist to improve the role of the Economic and Social Council in filling the gap between relief efforts and long-term reconstruction and development. We believe that this experience will provide useful lessons for enhancing coordination between the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council in addressing the post-conflict challenges faced by African countries.

Finally, regarding management issues, the initiative of the President of the Economic and Social Council, Ambassador Rosenthal, of presenting a memorandum on his recent experience in Geneva deserves our strongest attention. He has made a number of suggestions on how to improve the working methods of the Economic and Social Council in a way that would enable it to better discharge its statutory duties.

The European Union strongly appreciates Ambassador Rosenthal's initiative and what he stressed in his statement a few minutes ago. We cannot simply continue to repeat that the Economic and Social Council has a pivotal role in the United Nations system, while ignoring that it cannot perform many of its tasks efficiently because of its working methods. His idea of improving the ability of the general segment to carry out management tasks deserves our careful attention: it may not be a major reform, but it may well produce major results — and what we are seeking are results. The European Union encourages the President of the Economic and Social Council, Ambassador Rosenthal, to continue the process he has undertaken.

**Mr. Zaki** (Pakistan): We welcome the report of Economic and Social Council (A/58/3) for 2003. We also commend the President of the Economic and Social Council, Mr. Rosenthal, and other members of the Bureau for so ably steering the work of the Council during this year.

The Pakistan delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The Economic and Social Council, as we all know, is one of the most important organs of the United Nations and is vested with the responsibility of contributing towards the promotion of higher standards of living, full employment and conditions of economic and social progress and development. These are the sublime ideals set forth for us by the framers of the Charter.

During the past year, the Council held a series of useful meetings and discussions at its annual substantive session in Geneva, as well as at the spring meeting of the Economic and Social Council with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization, in pursuit of these objectives.

While many useful recommendations emerged from these meetings, particularly at the high-level segment, which was devoted to developing an integrated approach to rural development, a lot more needs to be done to make the world a happier home for the poor, underdeveloped and marginalized people.

Today's debate provides us with an opportunity to review the extent to which the Economic and Social Council has been able to achieve the objectives it has set for itself.

The Council is the central forum for the system-wide coordination of United Nations activities in the economic and social fields. Lately, it has also been given an important responsibility for the integrated and coordinated follow-up to and implementation of the outcomes of major United Nations conferences. It is, therefore, imperative that we explore all avenues to bring greater vitality and effectiveness to the work of the Council. We should particularly focus on improving the Council's coordination role vis-à-vis the Bretton Woods institutions, specialized agencies and United Nations funds and programmes.

Of greatest importance is the Council's role to contribute towards creating conditions that will stimulate economic growth and development in the underdeveloped and developing world. For this purpose, a number of important steps need to be taken

to ensure, first, that political commitment exists for achieving the agreed official development assistance target of 0.7 per cent of developed countries' gross national product; secondly, that ambitious efforts are made for debt write-off and debt restructuring, not only for the heavily indebted poor countries, but also for the low-income countries with a high growth and demand potential; thirdly, that required actions are taken for capacity-building and trade growth in the developing countries; and, fourthly, that bold political actions are taken to create innovative ways of financing development on concessional terms.

Together with larger financial and investment inflows into the developing countries, a more deliberate effort is also required to restore trade and exports as the engine of growth in developing countries. But this can only happen if there is a genuine endeavour to enable the developing countries to utilize trade for growth, rather than enforcing a globalization that further marginalizes those countries and locks them into patterns of dependency and underdevelopment.

What the world needs at this crucial juncture is action that would turn the talk about free markets, trade liberalization and the outcome of Doha Development Round into reality. The collapse of the trade talks at Cancún is a wake-up call for those who believe that the developing countries will accept persisting trade inequities masked by slogans and symbolism.

The failure at Cancún was the result of what happened in Doha, where the major trading countries refused to offer the promised concessions on development-related issues. The Declaration presented at Cancún did not address the major concerns of the developing countries. To avoid recurrence of such failures, the specific areas of interest to developing countries should remain at the core of multilateral trade negotiations, such as improving market access, special and differential treatment and the phasing out of agricultural subsidies.

The creation of a just and equitable international trading and finance system is the most important route to the revival of global economic growth and development and the realization of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly the goal of achieving a 50 per cent reduction of poverty by 2015.

For its part, the Economic and Social Council must play its role in creating conditions for correcting the imbalances in the world of trade and finance and registering tangible progress towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goals. These ambitious but imperative goals can be achieved only with a genuine political commitment on the part of all countries.

In the social sector, the Council is rendering valuable contributions, from the promotion of human rights to gender mainstreaming to achieving social development. The high-level segment this year underscored the fact that sustainable development and poverty eradication cannot be achieved without focusing on rural development, as three-fourths of the world's poor live in rural areas. In this context, the empowerment of rural women assumes particular importance.

The Government is actively pursuing a policy of far-reaching reforms to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty, especially in the rural areas, where 75 per cent of our people live. We are following an integrated approach that covers the economic, social and environmental dimensions, with emphasis on gender factors.

We in Pakistan have taken several concrete steps to ensure greater participation of women in the political process, with a view to achieving the empowerment of women and gender equality. Thirty-three per cent of seats in all local bodies have been reserved for women. Consequently, more than 40,000 women councillors, mostly in rural areas, have been elected across the country. Besides political empowerment, steps have been taken in the economic and social areas, such as compulsory and free primary education for all, particularly for girl children in rural areas; provision of affordable health care, including reproductive health; and equal opportunities for employment, vocational training and microcredit.

This is a real, peaceful revolution in which the Government and civil society are partners. There is great promise for the future, for the promotion of social and economic progress and the protection of human rights, hopefully leading to the building of a more humane society based on justice and the rule of law.

Before I close, I would like also to comment on the proposals presented by the President of the Economic and Social Council in his informal paper to strengthen the work of that body. We thank him for his thought-provoking ideas and believe that they merit

serious consideration. We are particularly attracted to the idea of rationalizing the work of the general segment. We look forward to discussing these and other ideas, with a view to strengthening the Council. A revitalized Economic and Social Council can make a real contribution to implementing its agenda of economic and social reform as well as the Millennium Development Goals.

**Mr. Drobnjak** (Croatia): At the outset, let me commend the President of the Economic and Social Council for his presentation of the report for the work of the Council in 2003. This is the third time that the report of the Council has been considered in the General Assembly and its committees, and in this regard we particularly welcome it. This reporting procedure enhances coordination and cooperation between two main United Nations bodies. However, let me reiterate what we said during Croatia's presidency of the Council last year — a substantive report, rather than a technical one, would be more conducive to our deliberations within the framework of the overall reform of the Organization.

We welcome the more efficient relationship between the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization (WTO), which can serve as the basis for broader-based and more inclusive international decision-making. In this regard, we look forward to an even more substantive and interactive spring meeting between the Council, the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO.

Allow me briefly to address the issue of United Nations humanitarian and disaster relief assistance, including special economic assistance. I will focus my remarks on the part of the world where Croatia is situated — Central and South-eastern Europe. The United Nations should increase its efforts to ensure a smooth transition from the provision of humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to development activities in post-conflict environments. A number of the remarks contained in the report entitled "Economic assistance to the Eastern European States affected by the developments in the Balkans" have little value in comparison terms, because the so-called successes of the central-market economy that existed prior to 1990 cannot be compared with the real values of liberalized market economies, regardless of the impact of war.

With the goal of streamlining efforts to stabilize South-east Europe, the Stability Pact for South-eastern Europe was established as an overarching framework for simultaneous development in the fields of security, economic recovery and the strengthening of democracy. Even though it did not attract as much aid and assistance as had been hoped, it produced tangible results in all three fields, contributing significantly to enhanced stability in that part of the world. The United Nations, as one of the participants in the Stability Pact's work, did not exercise its role to the fullest possible extent. Lessons learned — successes and failures alike — could be put to good use in other parts of the world that are plagued with problems relating to post-conflict stability, economic recovery and confidence-building.

Humanitarian and reconstruction aid, no matter how generous and far-reaching, cannot match the strategic importance of foreign direct investment. The essential prerequisite for foreign direct investment is a stable and democratic environment with stimulating macroeconomic measures, which is often lacking in countries in dire need of such investment. Therefore, development assistance, especially in the areas of capacity- and institution-building, should closely follow humanitarian assistance and post-conflict country rebuilding. This is the best possible investment in the stability of the countries and regions concerned. It is a weapon in the fight against a terrorism-infested environment — a weapon as powerful as a well-conducted military action.

Let me also point out under this item that my delegation welcomes the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Participation of volunteers, 'White Helmets', in the activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development". As a former recipient country, we are well aware of the important work of the "White Helmets" and other United Nations volunteers. We join those delegations that are ready to consider a better integration of volunteer activities into the United Nations system in order to be able to profit from within the existing resources of the opportunities offered by a well-established system.

With regard to enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and all relevant partners, in particular the private sector, my delegation welcomes the report of the Secretary-General and supports further cooperation in this field. We commend the role that the World Summit on Sustainable Development has played in enhancing the task of partnerships for the United

Nations system in support of United Nations goals. We support the recommendation made in the report of bringing under the same umbrella the Global Compact Office and the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships into one Partnership Office, within existing resources.

As we move into a phase of implementation of these complex and interrelated goals, it is essential that the United Nations show that it can provide practical orientations on issues that are of the utmost concern to people everywhere. A more substantive and interactive relationship should be developed between the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, as it would provide practical orientation to the international community in the follow-up to major conferences. Therefore, it would be important to maximize synergy between the Economic and Social Council and the Second and Third Committees, as well as between the Bureaux of the two Committees. To that end, we look forward to participating in the discussion of the indicative programme of work of the Second Committee to have it reflect the outcomes of recent major conferences and summits.

Finally, let me conclude by saying that, during the current session of the General Assembly, there has been a sense of expectation that this work in strengthening the Organization will be energized by engaging in a spirit of constructive dialogue on all of the above areas, with a view to strengthening the role of the United Nations as a leading institution in the multilateral arena. The Croatian delegation will try to contribute as much as possible towards that end through its Vice-Presidents in the Fourth and Second Committees and through an active approach in the forthcoming debate on the reforms of our Organization.

Finally, I would like to state that Croatia aligns itself with the statement of the European Union delivered this morning by the Italian European Union presidency.

**The President**: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 12.

**Agenda item 40**

**Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance**

**Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/344)**

**(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations**

**Reports of the Secretary-General (A/58/89, A/58/434)**

**(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions**

**Reports of the Secretary-General (A/58/133, A/58/244, A/58/225, A/58/273, A/58/280, A/58/285, A/58/286, A/58/358)**

**(c) Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster**

**Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/332)**

**(d) Participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in the activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development**

**Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/320)**

**(e) Assistance to the Palestinian people**

**Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/88 and Corr.1)**

**Mr. Bennouna** (Morocco): I am very proud to speak again on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on the very sensitive item on United Nations humanitarian assistance.

(*spoke in French*)

As members are aware, the question of strengthening the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance is an extremely sensitive issue, on which we ourselves have found it difficult to coordinate our action in the Group of 77 (G-77) and

China. Coordination at the global level is indeed difficult.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General Kofi Annan for the documents to which the President has just referred. These documents submitted to us assist us greatly in our efforts to coordinate the work of the United Nations in providing humanitarian assistance.

The Group of 77 and China believes particularly that the report submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 57/152, on international cooperation in humanitarian assistance following natural disasters, from the relief phase to the development phase, is an essential report. We will focus our statement on that report.

While it is true that the international community can play a very important role in the area of natural disasters, I wish to repeat what I said this morning. We cannot address United Nations humanitarian assistance without recalling how traumatized we all were by the tragic attack of 19 August, the target of which was the United Nations. It was an attack that, in a way, struck at the image that we all have of the Organization. These tragic events therefore compel us to review our role and to channel our work clearly. These events also prompt us to work to strengthen protection of United Nations staff, associated personnel and local staff, who do outstanding work in the field. An international convention has been adopted in this regard and is entering into force. We will now have to work to effectively protect United Nations personnel everywhere in the world.

Another thing that my Group wishes to recall is that the United Nations, if it is to be effective, must reach out to people. It cannot lock itself up in offices or behind ramparts. That openness is what United Nations work in the field is about.

The problem of natural disasters is crucially important to the international community, particularly, to the least developed countries. When these disasters occur, their impact on affected populations is long lasting, as it is on economic and social development and environmental protection. It is therefore up to us to determine how the international community can more effectively deal with these types of situations, which can have a lasting effect on the development of the least developed countries.

For the Group of 77 and China, the principle guidelines contained in the annex to resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991 are, and should remain, the basis of all responses to humanitarian emergency requests for assistance. These principles, in fact, should continue to allow us to play a fundamental role in the deployment of United Nations humanitarian assistance and assistance provided by other players, whether non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or other entities in the field.

In this context, I would like to recall that the State affected has the primary responsibility in the organization and development of humanitarian assistance. It is the affected State's responsibility, and it must call for international assistance and accept this humanitarian assistance. It has a fundamental role to play. But it is important for us, as the United Nations and the international community, to help such a State strengthen its capacities at the national and local levels and to foster closer cooperation between the affected State and the United Nations system and other humanitarian organizations. The States whose peoples are in need of emergency humanitarian assistance should facilitate the work of the humanitarian organizations, in particular, by providing security for the delivery of food, shelter and medical care.

As the Secretary-General pointed out in his report, we have seen during the last few years a significant increase in the number of natural disasters of which the poorest countries are the primary victims. Faced with this fact, the Group of 77 and China believes that it is vital to act first in terms of prevention. It is, in fact, essential to give priority to reducing what has been called vulnerability, through a global approach based on a greater effort at international cooperation. This means a strengthening of capacities, to transfer the appropriate technologies and to develop a system of advance warning in order to identify and predict natural disasters and possible disasters of a human origin. There are natural disasters and disasters that have a human origin.

In this context, the Group of 77 and China would like to reiterate the importance of strengthening international cooperation in all phases of a catastrophe, ranging from initial relief and mitigation to assistance for development, through a proper use of multilateral channels and the provision of adequate resources.

*Mr. Kirn (Slovenia), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

There are countries where, following a natural disaster, people sometimes remain in tents for months and even years. In this context, the Group of 77 and China welcomes the fact that the resolution adopted in the framework of the Economic and Social Council's humanitarian segment last July particularly encouraged donors to allot humanitarian assistance on the basis of need, with a view to ensuring a more equitable distribution of humanitarian assistance across all emergencies, including those of a protracted nature.

It is true that resources are often abundant in humanitarian situations that have benefited from wide media coverage. By contrast, significantly less in the way of resources is provided, unfortunately, to certain geographical areas, or when the relief phase gives way to the development phase.

It is appropriate to reiterate here that contributions for humanitarian assistance should never be granted to the detriment of resources that are provided as cooperation for development. When I say that there is media coverage, I mean that when television screens show natural disasters, there is always a strong reaction from the community. But, when television and other media leave and no longer show what is happening, we get the impression that nothing is happening any longer, whereas obviously people's hardships do continue.

In his report, the Secretary-General refers to the coordination efforts now underway between the United Nations Development Programme, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. This coordination should be strengthened with a view to advancing the implementation of provisions related to vulnerability, risk assessment and disaster management. All of this is contained in the Plan of Implementation that was adopted in Johannesburg at the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

I would like at this point to mention the use of remote-sensing technologies, both in space and land-based, which have become very important for the prediction and mitigation of natural disasters. As we know, access to scientific progress in outer space should be access for all humankind, because such research — at least, basic research in that category — is considered to be the heritage of humankind. Unfortunately, developing countries often do not have access this very costly remote-sensing technology. It is therefore essential to encourage a transfer to the developing countries of these technologies that can save human lives.

The Secretary-General, in his report, also referred to the need to take into account the special needs of the most vulnerable populations. The Group of 77 and China reiterate on this occasion that the international community must appropriately and on a priority basis take into account the specific needs of the least developed countries affected by natural disasters. This should be done in the framework of what I would call a real duty to provide assistance, the duty of all those who have the means to come to the aid of those who are in danger. We may call this an obligation, of sorts, to assist a community in danger.

As in previous sessions, the Group of 77 and China will submit a draft resolution on international cooperation on humanitarian assistance following natural disasters, ranging from relief through development. The Group of 77 is delighted at the growing support that this resolution is receiving and hopes that it will encounter even broader international consensus this year. This would constitute a real message of hope for us and numerous people the world over as they come to believe in this duty of international solidarity.

**Mr. Spatafora** (Italy): I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union. The acceding countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, the associated countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union sees today's debate as an important opportunity to focus the attention of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session on humanitarian issues: an area where the leading role of the United Nations is uncontested and with respect to which the international community and those in need have high expectations. I wish to take this opportunity to renew the European Union's commitment to strengthening United Nations action in this area, especially at a time when the number of humanitarian

crises is increasing and when we are faced with growing challenges in terms of resources, security and access.

I wish to express, on behalf of the European Union, our sorrow at the deaths of personnel who lost their lives bringing relief to the poor and the needy. The safety and security of humanitarian personnel working in the field is a key issue for the European Union, and must be addressed effectively. In this regard, we condemn all cases of violence against humanitarian personnel, including abductions, such as the case of the Médecins Sans Frontières worker Arjan Erkel, abducted in Dagestan in August 2002.

However, condemning deliberate attacks on humanitarian personnel is not enough. The international community must act jointly and decisively to end the culture of impunity wherever it exists. In this regard, the European Union welcomes the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1502 (2003) on the protection of humanitarian personnel, and urges States to fully comply with its recommendations. The European Union also welcomes the Secretary-General's recent expression of support with regard to the issue of security in the field, and looks forward to the concrete initiatives that will follow the current review phase.

The European Union is convinced that the International Criminal Court can play an important role in deterring intentional attacks on humanitarian personnel, as well as serious violations of international humanitarian law. We warmly welcome the start of the Court Prosecutor's work, and reiterate our full support for it.

While stressing the need for increased security, the European Union also wishes to underline the importance of having United Nations staff present in crisis situations. The international community expects the United Nations to be physically present in order to provide not only humanitarian assistance but also necessary humanitarian protection for those in need. A central challenge is achieving a balance between minimizing the security risk and providing a meaningful humanitarian presence. We strongly urge all Governments and parties to armed conflict and those in post-conflict situations to cooperate fully with the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies and organizations in providing safe and unimpeded access to vulnerable populations.

The General Assembly must consider several important issues in today's debate, including strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance, as well as specific regional and country situations. The European Union would like to see greater emphasis on pressing thematic issues and situations relevant to the humanitarian community. We are convinced that the sectoral policies and guidelines that the General Assembly is expected to produce should also be applicable to specific country situations.

The European Union welcomes the outcome of the humanitarian segment of last July's Economic and Social Council session. Once again, that segment provided appropriate guidance on a number of important issues: the protection of civilians in complex emergencies; sexual abuse and exploitation in humanitarian crises; the role of affected countries and communities in facing emergencies; the role of military assets in the provision of humanitarian assistance; the transition from relief to development; and the respective roles of States, United Nations agencies and donors in providing a coordinated and effective response. The European Union looks forward to further developing humanitarian policies and guidelines on those issues in the wider context of the General Assembly.

The European Union provides about half of all global humanitarian assistance. In 2002 alone, European Union member States collectively contributed more than 2 billion euros, while the European Commission, through its humanitarian office, allocated more than 537 million euros to projects in more than 60 countries. Although humanitarian assistance has more than doubled in recent years, however, the growing number of crises that the international community has to face puts enormous pressure on donors. Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Southern Africa, Haiti and Sri Lanka are just some examples of high-profile emergencies. The humanitarian community has been required to ensure maximum coordination and coherence of all available instruments. Maximizing the use of limited resources and ensuring their equitable allocation based on need are the main challenges that we currently face.

The debate recently launched on "good donorship" and the harmonization of procedures may contribute significantly to meeting those challenges. The European Union is willing to go into greater depth

in this debate, together with other donors and partners, so as to improve the effectiveness and coordination of humanitarian assistance. We expect the United Nations, particularly the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), to play a major role in that process.

The European Union furthermore believes that the issue of the transition from relief to development should be considered in an integrated manner involving both humanitarian and development actors. We also addressed that matter earlier this morning.

Advocacy is another important area that requires the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to take a leadership role. In so-called forgotten emergencies, in particular, there is a clear need for a coherent advocacy and public information strategy. In that respect I fully support the comments made by Ambassador Bennouna earlier.

A more specific advocacy role is also needed in relation to the most vulnerable groups, particularly women and children, internally displaced persons and civilians in armed conflict. Such a role will require more effective coordination among OCHA, the Security Council, the Department for Peacekeeping Operations and the various agencies, funds and programmes operating in the field.

In that context, the European Union commends the indispensable advocacy role played by civil society. The role of non-governmental organizations has been instrumental in bringing about a more forceful response from the United Nations to humanitarian crises in many parts of the world, especially Africa. Their role in providing humanitarian assistance is also extremely important. The European Union will continue to support the activities of non-governmental organizations, as well as of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the strengthening of the partnership and coordination between the United Nations and civil society in the humanitarian field.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate the European Union's full support for the work of the United Nations in the humanitarian area and its readiness to engage with all stakeholders in finding ways and means to improve the effectiveness, coordination, coherence and consistency of our humanitarian response. We very much rely on the leading role of OCHA in this respect, and I wish the new Emergency Relief Coordinator, Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland, every success in his new and challenging position.

**Mr. Løvald** (Norway): In late June, Annalena Tonelli received a 2003 Nansen Refugee Award in recognition of decades of quiet devotion and selflessness in helping the poorest of the poor in remote and difficult places in Somalia. She touched the lives of thousands of people. Yet two weeks ago, she was brutally murdered outside her hospital in Borama. With the 19 August massacre at the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad — which caused the tragic deaths of Sergio Vieira de Mello and 21 other humanitarians — still fresh in our minds, the safety of humanitarian workers has been moved to the top of the international agenda. The disturbing trend of blatant disrespect for humanitarian workers that the Secretary-General pointed out in his report to the Economic and Social Council this summer — a trend that has been further documented in two reports to the General Assembly at this session — has been exacerbated by the unprecedented magnitude and anti-United Nations hostility of the Baghdad massacre.

The deliberate targeting of United Nations and humanitarian personnel for violent action is alarming, and calls for a concerted effort to reverse a trend which runs counter to the most basic tenets of international humanitarian law. Efforts must be intensified at all levels, from normative work and practical security measures to punitive action against the perpetrators and the restoration of general respect for the inviolability of the humanitarian space.

It is, for instance, time to put renewed energy into strengthening the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. The reinforcement of the United Nations security management system and the Inter-Agency Security Management Network, and its increasing cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), must continue.

Stronger action must be taken by all States to ensure that any threat or act of violence committed against humanitarian personnel on their territory is investigated fully and the perpetrators brought to justice. A climate of impunity is, quite simply, unacceptable.

It has been said that the best protection for humanitarian workers is local understanding and backing. Something has clearly gone wrong when United Nations and humanitarian personnel are viewed

as representing an enemy that may be attacked anywhere as part of a global or ideological struggle. Humanitarian efforts are becoming viewed as part of other agendas. This raises fundamental questions for the United Nations and the humanitarian community, such as how to avoid being identified with political military actions that are being resisted. When are they to retreat before extremist groups and say no to helping people in need because of unreasonable risks to their own staff, when locally recruited humanitarian personnel, in fact, account for the majority of casualties? Thus the international community, in working through national counterparts and structures, makes them, in reality, substitute soft targets.

States, and perhaps donor States in particular, cannot ignore those difficult questions, but they call for a revival, rather than a revision, of the humanitarian principles of humanity, independence, neutrality and impartiality. We need to hold the banner of humanitarianism high, to quote the new Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Humanitarianism is a universal value and a noble commitment that must have an independent space in international relations. It embodies compassion for fellow human beings in need and, as such, deserves to be respected and protected. Humanitarian workers are flag-bearers against hunger, thirst, illness, deprivation, abuse, neglect, exploitation and despair. They carry with them food, water, medicines, shelter, care, empathy and hope. Their mission of saving lives, alleviating suffering and maintaining and restoring human dignity is as imperative as ever.

While the safety of humanitarian staff and their unimpeded access to vulnerable populations are operational prerequisites, we must also continue our longstanding and tedious work to improve the instruments or tools that they have at their disposal to meet the enormous need for their services.

Over the past few years, a great deal of progress has been made in enhancing the coordination of humanitarian assistance. The consolidated appeals process is well established as a coordination tool. Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement in terms of greater and more systematic integration of a gender perspective and an increased emphasis on including an HIV/AIDS component in all relevant programming areas.

As we know, consolidated appeals process advocacy and especially its fundraising function continue to pose a major challenge. Overall, the volume of humanitarian assistance is still too small compared to the need for it, and its distribution is far from equitable. Some high-profile priority cases receive the bulk of the assistance, while some emergencies seem to be more or less forgotten.

Norway is encouraged by the Emergency Relief Coordinator's resolution to give priority to those forgotten emergencies and to the pressing need for a durable solution to them. But significant increases in the total level of assistance will be required for that purpose.

The consolidated appeals process is about team-building and teamwork within the United Nations family and between the United Nations and recipient States. It is also increasingly about reaching out to include other humanitarian actors in order to forge a stronger common humanitarian agenda. This collaborative approach has some way to go before it can be described as successful in the field. If it is successful, it may well have a decisive impact on efforts to protect and assist, particularly as concerns internally displaced persons, ensuring them a more predictable response from the United Nations system.

Teamwork and team-building are also very important when it comes to bridging the relief-to-development gap. It is very encouraging to observe how the "4-R" concept of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) — repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction — has become accepted terminology in the development community.

Recent studies — and they are numerous in the field of humanitarian assistance — have drawn our attention to the fact that much can be done to enhance the efficiency of humanitarian assistance through better coordination, not just among implementing partners, but also among donors.

The Stockholm Conference on Good Humanitarian Donorship, held last June, adopted principles and created a plan of action in order to reverse today's reality, in which the totality of donors' efforts is less than the sum of the individual parts. An ambitious implementation effort has been started under Canada's leadership, and we look forward to participating in the pilot project envisaged for Burundi

in 2004 and for the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2005.

Whether we are dealing with good donorship, coordination of humanitarian assistance or the safety of humanitarian workers, we must never lose sight of the fact that the impact of our action or inaction is very real for those of our fellow human beings who need our help.

Annalena Tonelli attributed her motivation to

> "my invincible trust in humanity, my unshakeable hope that men and women of goodwill from all corners of the world would decide to fight for those who were not given the opportunity to live a life worthy of being called a life".

That should be the essence of our humanitarian mission.

**Mr. Atta** (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Egypt would like to reaffirm the importance of the General Assembly's assuming a leading role in following up and evaluating humanitarian assistance activities. Egypt calls on the United Nations, its organs and its specialized agencies to help those States that need to build their national institutional capacities. The United Nations must also focus on achieving the necessary coordination among all humanitarian assistance entities — be they United Nations bodies or other relevant organizations — working in the field, in order to meet the challenges posed by natural disasters and the consequences of war through the implementation of an integrated approach to deal with natural disasters at all stages, from early warning to relief to reconstruction and development.

Egypt calls on those States that are financially able to do so, and on the international financial institutions, to increase their contributions in order to fund humanitarian relief and assistance activities, in fulfilment of the principles of international solidarity and interdependence, and with the letter and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations.

Egypt once again calls upon the international community to intervene with urgency to deal with the humanitarian disaster faced by the Palestinian people and with their subjection to practices that have led to unprecedented suffering in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/58/1) makes clear reference to the closures and curfews imposed by the Israeli occupation forces, which has led to the economic paralysis that has left more than 1 million in poverty. The report also refers to the military operations that have left approximately 10,000 Palestinians homeless.

Egypt fully appreciates the positive role played by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which has provided assistance to more than 4 million refugees. We would like to thank all organizations and agencies providing humanitarian relief and assistance to the Palestinian people. We call upon donor countries to increase their support for those efforts by providing the necessary financing and assistance in order to fill the gap in UNRWA's budget, meet the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people and take a very firm stance against all actions impeding the delivery of assistance to those in need.

My delegation calls upon the Secretariat to include in the report of the Secretary-General to be submitted next year to the General Assembly and to the Economic and Social Council an analytical presentation of the efforts of the United Nations with respect to the humanitarian situation in the occupied territories because of the difficulties faced in providing that international humanitarian assistance and to suggest solutions to those difficulties so that the General Assembly and the Security Council can take appropriate measures.

Egypt calls upon the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to coordinate and cooperate with UNRWA in order to follow up on the humanitarian situation of the Palestinians under Israeli occupation, including the situation of the refugees, because they are an integral segment of those civilians who need humanitarian help.

Egypt believes that it is a timely priority that the United Nations assume an active role in expanding and ensuring the protection of humanitarian relief workers, and we underscore the importance of not limiting that protection to legal aspects alone. The United Nations should focus on the need for the political resolve of all States, whether or not they are a party to an agreement to host such operations. I would mention here the report of the Secretary-General, which shows that most of the victims were Palestinian UNRWA workers. That

fact compels us to give sufficient importance to extending protection to those relief operations that are more exposed to dangers than other operations and to relief workers whose security and safety are threatened.

**Mr. Zhang** Yishan (China): The Chinese delegation wishes to thank the Secretariat for the series of reports of the Secretary-General on this item. My delegation supports the statement made by Morocco, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and is ready to take an active and constructive part in the discussion of this item and in the consultations for drafting resolutions.

The Chinese delegation would like to take this opportunity to welcome Mr. Jan Egeland, the newly appointed Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. We also wish to express our appreciation and admiration to his predecessor, Mr. Kenzo Oshima and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), under his leadership, for a job well done in coordinating United Nations humanitarian assistance activities.

The Chinese delegation agrees with the general review and analysis made by the Secretary-General in his report (A/58/344) on the overall humanitarian situation in 2002-2003. During the past year, the world has witnessed frequent outbreaks of natural disasters and armed conflicts, as well as the growing threat of the spread of HIV/AIDS and the aggravation of the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons. As a consequence, humanitarian assistance is facing more serious challenges than ever before.

In order to better respond to and overcome these challenges, it is necessary to reiterate once again the guidelines established by resolution 46/182 on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance. The United Nations and the international community should consistently follow those guidelines in providing humanitarian assistance to the affected countries. Humanity, neutrality and impartiality should be maintained, as should full respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of recipient countries. Humanitarian assistance activities should be carried out with the consent of, and at the request of, affected countries, without any conditionality.

The Chinese delegation believes that adequate funding is a necessary condition and a basic requirement for the success of any humanitarian assistance endeavour and for a smooth transition from relief to development. As a tool of coordination, strategic planning and advocacy, the Consolidated Appeals Process has consistently played a significant role in humanitarian assistance funding. However, over recent years, the proportion of funds made available through this channel has been steadily declining. This situation has drawn close attention from all sides. We are seriously concerned and hope that efforts in this field will be further enhanced. We repeat our appeal to those countries that are in a position to do so to actively mobilize resources for humanitarian assistance.

The issue of the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and the protection of United Nations personnel has attracted increasing attention. As the Secretary-General indicates in his report, United Nations personnel continue to face major threats to their safety and security in all regions of operation; physical violence directed against them is the most dangerous of all. Two months ago, an explosion at the United Nations office in Iraq took the lives of more than 20 United Nations personnel on duty, including Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq and former Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. Here, we would like once again to express our deep condolences.

China is also a country prone to natural disasters. This year, it has suffered a succession of floods and earthquakes which have taken a heavy economic toll. Nevertheless, the Chinese Government, within its capacity, has continued to give through bilateral channels all forms of assistance to other developing countries. It has also stepped up its emergency humanitarian and disaster relief assistance efforts. This year, our country has provided food assistance to affected countries in Africa and emergency humanitarian supplies to refugees, as well as to earthquake- and flood-affected areas in Africa and Asia. The Chinese Government expresses its support for the relevant report and recommendations on providing special economic assistance to individual countries under this item. Let me conclude by expressing thanks to OCHA for its concern and assistance to China in our fight against the earthquakes and floods this year.

**Mr. Staehelin** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): The Secretary-General's reports describe, in a concise and structured manner, the complex reality faced in the

deployment of international humanitarian aid. Events that have taken place since the Economic and Social Council's recent substantive session have made evident how numerous and significant are the obstacles faced by international humanitarian assistance.

We have not forgotten the unspeakable acts perpetrated against the United Nations offices and personnel in Baghdad last August 19, not to mention the deliberate attacks that have cost the lives of delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Iraq and in Afghanistan and of national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies staff elsewhere in the world. We also know that employees of humanitarian non-governmental organizations also fall victim to abduction or assassination, and that these organizations must deal with all kinds of pressure.

All these acts are unacceptable, and the perpetrators must be punished without delay, in accordance with national legislation and international obligations, such as those laid out in the provisions of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, an instrument that went into effect over 15 months ago.

Switzerland attaches utmost priority to preserving space for humanitarian assistance in all circumstances and without exception. Respect for international humanitarian law by all parties to a conflict, be they States or armed groups, is pivotal to the preservation of this space. As a State party to, and a depositary of, the Geneva Conventions, Switzerland invites all States that have not yet done so to ratify these Conventions' Additional Protocols.

We must furthermore firmly reiterate the need to guarantee unimpeded access by humanitarian personnel to those in distress. In this regard, the neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian action must be completely respected. When we say "independence", we mean the autonomy of humanitarian objectives in relation to political, economic or military objectives or any other objective one might have in areas where humanitarian action takes place.

We equally feel that specific efforts must be made at all levels in order to improve the protection afforded to civilian populations, especially women and children, who are the primary victims of current crises and conflicts. Where the prevention of human suffering fails, the humanitarian imperative to relieve it remains. Still, the commitment expected of humanitarian organizations cannot, in this sense, replace the efforts of the international community aimed at preventing the need for, or the prolonging of, international humanitarian aid.

In disaster or complex emergency situations, the primary role of humanitarian organizations must also be asserted vis-à-vis the use of military resources, as prescribed by the Oslo Guidelines adopted on the subject in 1994 and 2003.

The coordination of international humanitarian assistance falls to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), newly placed under the direction of Mr. Jan Egeland, to whom we express our support in the performance of his difficult and complex tasks. Over the coming months, Switzerland will commit itself to strengthening OCHA's role as the mainspring of international humanitarian coordination, notably by means of a transparent dialogue between donor countries and members of the Group of 77, be they directly or indirectly affected by disasters, crises or conflicts.

Our aim will also be to place the financing of OCHA's activities on a more solid and foreseeable footing, with a view to increasing the regular budgeted contribution of the United Nations. We will also be committed to optimizing strategic planning and coordination mechanisms in the field, as well as to the efficiency and effectiveness of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Finally, there will be a need to review the means for financing contingency planning for emergency situations. The importance of such planning is crucial, whether we are dealing with natural or technological disasters, crises, or conflicts.

The neglect of human suffering by political, security or economic agendas, as well as by the media, should be our first and foremost challenge. The credibility of the international community is at stake.

On a different note, we look forward to the recommendations of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Group on issues concerning the transition from relief to development. We are, indeed, convinced of the urgent need to find concrete ways and means to improve the international response to situations of transition, so as to avoid their turning into chronic crises.

On the subject of transition, we should like to encourage humanitarian and development organizations to intensify their cooperation so that the HIV/AIDS epidemic's short- and long-term consequences are considered in their respective programmes and projects. In a high-level meeting devoted to the subject, right here in the framework of the General Assembly last 22 September, an intensified commitment to the fight against HIV/AIDS was made. The theme will also be high on the agenda of the upcoming twenty-eighth International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, to be held in Geneva from 2 to 6 December.

**Mr. Isakov** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): In his address to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session, the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, highlighted the moral and political importance of United Nations humanitarian activities for millions of people suffering from hunger, disease, natural disasters and conflicts. It is precisely in this area where the United Nations has achieved real results, bringing it further political and moral authority. To a greater extent, this is a logical outcome of the consistent adherence by the United Nations to the fundamental principles of humanitarian assistance: neutrality, humanity, impartiality and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. At the same time, it is the outcome of the undeniable comparative advantages of the United Nations and its unique legitimacy, inter alia when coordinating multilateral action in the field.

The Russian Federation commends the work done by the United Nations system to improve the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance. We note the lead role played in this process by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Coordination mechanisms, in particular the Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeals, continue to do effective work and are constantly improving their work. An important job is also being done by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the former United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Kenzo Oshima, for the great amount of useful work he did, and to wish his successor, Mr. Jan Egeland, every success in his crucial, difficult but extremely noble, work.

In the humanitarian area, extremely serious challenges have emerged. The problem of forecasting and increasing preparedness for adequate response to emergency situations is becoming ever more important. Increasingly, the United Nations is facing complex humanitarian situations aggravated by the results of conflicts, epidemics and natural disasters. This requires a comprehensive, integrated and coordinated reaction, one that often goes beyond traditional short-term humanitarian operations. It is precisely for that reason that it is important to focus on the transition from humanitarian assistance to reconstruction and development assistance.

An effective and smooth transition is the key to the success of international humanitarian efforts, post-conflict peace-building and the building of a foundation for socio-economic development. It is particularly important that there be coordinated efforts with the lead role played by the United Nations. Clearly, the effectiveness of these efforts will depend directly on the amount of resources provided.

We believe, therefore, that all major participants in the reconstruction process, including United Nations programmes, funds and specialized agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions, should have some reserve capacity that could, if necessary, be drawn upon prior to a reaction from the donor community, which often is not prompt enough and is sometimes inadequate. We also believe that in post-conflict situations, particularly during the transition to peace-building and reconstruction, there is great scope for intensifying productive interaction between the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council.

One serious problem still remains which is providing for the safety and security of humanitarian personnel. The tragic events of recent months that took place in Iraq are another reminder of this. Among the specific tasks to improve international humanitarian cooperation, the following can be highlighted: better preparedness and improved effectiveness of emergency planning and management mechanisms; strengthening the regional presence of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in disaster-prone areas; improving emergency warning networks in the case of major emergency situations in order to coordinate national rescue services and the use of up-to-date rescue and other specialized technologies in international rescue operations.

We support the proposal of the United Nations Secretary-General contained in his report on the work of the Organization, regarding the need to improve the operational mechanisms of interaction, and to strengthen the synergy between the national, regional and international efforts to deal with the consequences of natural disasters.

Russia has increased its contribution to United Nations humanitarian operations and is gradually restoring its donor capacity. During the first six months of 2003, Russia's Ministry of Emergency Situations provided humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia, Eritrea, Algeria, Ecuador and Tajikistan, as well as to Iraq, totalling more than $3 million. This year the Russian Government adopted a decision to give voluntary contributions to the World Food Programme (WFP) totalling $11 million and $2 million to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Together with this, Russia is prepared to make available highly qualified human and technological potential from our Ministry, for United Nations humanitarian operations involving emergency situations. We think this solid potential will be put to good use by the humanitarian agencies.

International post-Chernobyl cooperation remains particularly important. We think that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) should remain the lead link in the infrastructure providing international post-Chernobyl cooperation. We welcome the fact that United Nations Under-Secretary-General Egeland has confirmed this point. We take note of the launch, in June 2003, of the International Chernobyl Research and Information Network and we commend the creation of the Chernobyl Forum under the aegis of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Post-Chernobyl cooperation has constantly been the focus of attention of the leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The latest CIS summit held in Yalta in September 2003 appealed to United Nations Member States to proclaim 26 April the day of the Chernobyl disaster, an international day to commemorate the victims of radiation disasters and catastrophes. This appeal is reflected in the draft resolution that the Russian Federation, Belarus and Ukraine intend to submit at the current session of the United Nations General Assembly. We hope that all delegations will support this noble initiative.

**Ms. Barghouti** (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): The discussion of the Assembly concerning agenda item 40 (e): Assistance to the Palestinian people, comes at a time when the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, is seriously and unprecedentedly deteriorating, in the economic, social, cultural and environmental areas, as a result of the continued Israeli occupation, the intensification of the occupation's coercive and oppressive policies, measures and practices against the Palestinian people, the Palestinian National Authority and the elected leadership.

In this context, my delegation wishes to express its thanks and gratitude to the United Nations Secretary-General for his comprehensive report submitted under this item (A/58/88), which deals with the difficult and deteriorating conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories, the negative impact of Israeli policies and measures on the living conditions of the Palestinian people and the acute economic and human crises the Palestinian people are facing. The summary of the report indicates that,

> "Tight internal and external closures, widespread curfews, incursions and other measures taken by the Israeli military led to a further worsening of economic indicators and to an increase in poverty and unemployment levels among Palestinians. The capacity of the Palestinian Authority was diminished just as needs increased." (A/58/88)

Similarly, the report refers to observations made by the Personal Humanitarian Envoy of the Secretary-General, Catherine Bertini, in August 2002, indicating that the main causes of the humanitarian and economic crises of the Palestinians have been,

> "Israel's systematic imposition of severe restrictions on the movement of Palestinian goods and people across borders and within the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This strict closure policy has effectively divided the occupied Palestinian territory into approximately 50 isolated pockets." (A/58/88, para. 6)

In this context, the World Bank submitted a report, published in March 2003 and entitled "Two Years of Intifada, Closures and Palestinian Economic Crisis: An Assessment", which addressed the blockade, closures and the Palestinian economic crisis after 27 months of the intifada, to the meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank held in

Dubai at the end of September. The World Bank warned of the financial collapse of the Palestinian Authority at a time when the Palestinian people are suffering from increased poverty, destitution and unemployment. The report adds that the continued Israeli blockade of the Palestinian territories threatens to have even more severe consequences in the light of the state of repression that the Palestinian people are undergoing.

We are gravely concerned at the report's statistics showing already poor conditions for the Palestinians with respect to employment becoming even worse. Moreover, there is a further drop-off in investment and an increased level of debt owed by the Palestinian Authority to private companies. The report states that losses to the Palestinian gross domestic product after three years of the intifada amounted to $5.2 billion, that the per capita income of Palestinians fell 46 per cent since 1999, that 60 per cent of the population faces poverty and that more than 75 per cent of the population of the Gaza Strip are very poor.

It is quite clear that the worsening crisis and its causes stem from the continued Israeli policies of blockades, checkpoints, settler colonialism, land confiscation and the construction of the expansionist wall, which has resulted in the confiscation of thousands of dunums and the ruining of the lives of tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians. Since September 2000, Israel has escalated its aggressive bloody campaign against the Palestinian people, which has led to the death of 2,600 Palestinian martyrs and the injury of more than 36,000 others, some of whom were left completely disabled. Furthermore, occupation forces have bombed and destroyed several homes and private and public facilities, uprooted trees and deliberately destroyed the infrastructure, including roads and water and sanitation networks. These Israeli practices against the Palestinian people are war crimes and constitute flagrant violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

We call on the international community to intensify pressure on Israel, the occupying Power, to implement its commitments in accordance with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and in compliance with the will of the international community that calls on Israel to put an end to its aggression, destruction and racist settlement policy. It is important to recall the collective and individual responsibility of the parties to the Convention to respect and guarantee respect for the Convention's provisions in all cases.

My delegation takes this opportunity to express its special gratitude to our brothers in the Arab States who received many seriously wounded Palestinians and who provided emergency assistance and medical supplies. Most importantly, they provided crucial assistance to maintain the functioning infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority and of the Palestinian population as a whole.

We also wish to thank the other friendly States, foremost among them the European Union and Japan, that provided humanitarian and general assistance to our people. We also thank the donor countries and the non-governmental organizations that provided emergency humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people. In that respect, we must seriously counter Israeli measures against these States and institutions, the deliberate killing they are subjected to and the damage that Israel inflicts on their facilities. We call on the international community to provide protection to those institutions, commensurate with the requirements of international humanitarian law.

We emphasize that donor countries and United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), should continue to provide all kinds of support and assistance to the Palestinian people, who have been blockaded by the Israeli occupation, in order to improve their living conditions, to alleviate their suffering, to revive the peace process and to return to the negotiating table.

We agree with the conclusions of the aforementioned report of the Secretary-General that while international assistance might alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people, only a comprehensive political settlement ending occupation can put an end to the real humanitarian and economic crisis faced by a growing number of people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The realization of a comprehensive and just peace, as well as peace and security for the countries of our region, requires not only Israel's total withdrawal from all occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan Heights, but also recognition of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian State in their own territory. If those objectives are not achieved,

no progress can be made in the peace process and no one can talk about regional development or cooperation with Israel, the occupying Power.

In that respect, we stress the role of the United Nations in achieving this just and comprehensive peace, based on the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the Palestine question. We also stress the importance of the role of the United Nations in providing assistance to the Palestinian people and of that of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority.

**Mr. Rudenko** (Ukraine) (*spoke in Russian*): I shall speak on agenda item 40 (c), concerning international cooperation with respect to the Chernobyl disaster. First, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on this agenda item, contained in document A/58/332. Despite the fact that 17 years have passed since the disaster, the situation in the affected territories of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia remains complex. As the representative of the Ukraine parliamentary committee dealing with the task of protecting our people from the effects of the Chernobyl accident, I would add that the situation remains extremely complicated.

With the passage of time — particularly since the closing of the Chernobyl nuclear station and our country's voluntary act for the sake of future generations — for the many who have no direct contact with it, the problem of Chernobyl is gradually losing its acuteness. But for Ukraine, Chernobyl signifies the more than 3 million people who suffered from that disaster and its consequences, including 1.2 million children. Chernobyl signifies the 160,000 people from 170 towns and villages who had to leave their homes and be relocated outside the areas of radioactive contamination. Chernobyl signifies the towns, villages, forests and fields — an area of more than 4,000 square kilometres — that are dead.

Three years ago, Ukraine did its duty and closed the Chernobyl nuclear power station. We have paid an excessively high price for that station, on three occasions. The first time was when, during the existence of the Soviet Union, despite the will of the Ukrainian people, we were forced to build the nuclear power station. We paid again in 1991, when we had to deal alone with that tragedy that had taken the lives and health of people, poisoned the land and the air and caused massive resettlement. The third time we paid was when, despite the economic difficulties we faced and the difficult situation in the energy sector, we closed that electric power station, which had not exhausted its capacity and for whose operational safety a large amount of money had been spent. We note with regret that complying with the demands of the international community for the speedy closure of Chernobyl actually did more harm than good to Ukraine.

The measures undertaken by Ukraine to mitigate the situation are reflected in the annex to the report of the Secretary-General, and I will therefore not dwell on them in detail. I would like, however, to draw attention to the fact that every year Ukraine spends 5 per cent to 7 per cent of its national budget on dealing with the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. Between 1986 to 2003 we spent more than $12 billion to that end. Ukraine continues to bear — by itself — the main social burden of dealing with the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

We support the appeal made at the recent session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe calling on the United Nations, the countries of the Group of Eight, the European Union and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, to grant, to Ukraine, on an emergency basis, the necessary scientific, technical and economic assistance for urgent action to mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. The moral aspect of this problem is of enormous importance. Like the representative of Russia, I call upon all delegations to support the initiative of the heads of State of the Commonwealth of Independent States to proclaim 26 April as a day to commemorate the victims of the radiation catastrophes. I appeal to the General Assembly to proclaim that as an international day within the context of the United Nations. We are duty-bound to do that in memory of those who died, as well as for the living. I am also confident that the General Assembly will adopt a resolution on the Chernobyl question, which will give additional impetus to our cooperation in resolving the problem of Chernobyl.

We are grateful to the Secretary-General for the attention that the Organization continues to give to the Chernobyl item, as is borne out by today's discussion and by the documents submitted. I would like to note in particular the efforts made by the Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund.

At the same time, I would like to see real action, rather than mere drafts on paper. One body that does very specific work on Chernobyl is the International Chernobyl Centre for Nuclear Safety, Radioactive Waste and Radioecology. I would also like to take note of the three pilot projects of the Chernobyl Trust Fund, as well as the opening of the international Chernobyl Research and Information Network (ICRIN). We hope that the work done in ICRIN will prove to be just the start of the real work, otherwise it will be hard to explain to the victims the usefulness of the project.

We are deeply alarmed at the situation with regard to the Trust Fund, which, according to our information, in the past year was replenished only from interest on the money in the Fund. In this connection, we must step up our work with the donors regarding the specific projects elaborated by the United Nations during the recovery phase. We need to see innovation and the concretization of the proposals to mobilize resources through the organization of representative international donor conference.

All of the points that I have raised are in response to the question of why we need to keep the item of Chernobyl on the agenda of the General Assembly and continue to consider the problem as a humanitarian disaster, the consequences of which continue to have a negative impact on the lives of people in the entire region — the lives of present and future generations.

**Mr. Snowdon** (Australia): Tragic events over the past 12 months — disasters, conflicts and terrorist attacks — have cut short the lives of many civilians and injured many others. The resultant widespread grief, distress and displacement have created enormous humanitarian challenges for the United Nations and for the international community. We should all be thankful that there are people who, in order to meet humanitarian needs throughout the world, work selflessly and, not infrequently, put their own safety, security and well-being at risk. That risk has been unfortunately and tragically underlined in Iraq.

The Australian Government condemned in the strongest terms the attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. I want to pay tribute to the Secretary-General's senior representative in Baghdad, Sergio Vieira De Mello, and his colleagues and express our condolences, sympathy and concern at the senseless injury and loss of life. Australia deplores attacks on humanitarian personnel wherever they occur, and we call upon all parties to ensure the safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel to affected civilian populations. There should be no impunity for the perpetrators of such attacks. They must be promptly bought to justice.

Strengthened coordination of United Nations humanitarian and disaster relief assistance will improve its impact and quality on the ground. Consequently, Australia strongly supports the role of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and its efforts to facilitate coordination of the United Nations responses to natural disasters and complex emergencies.

In particular, Australia welcomes the United Nations decision to establish the Joint Logistics Centre, which has provided important logistics support to humanitarian agencies operating in Iraq and to which Australia has provided financial support. Such initiatives significantly improve inter-agency coordination efforts during critical phases of humanitarian response.

However, there remains ample scope for United Nations organizations to improve collaboration with each other and with OCHA, both at Headquarters and in the field. In this regard, we welcome further efforts by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the transitional working group under Carol Bellamy and the United Nations Development Group under Mark Malloch Brown to strengthen coordination frameworks for humanitarian assistance and ensure effective transition to development assistance. Australia, through participation in the Montreux process and the Working Group on OCHA, will remain engaged in efforts to further enhance these frameworks.

Australia attaches particular importance to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, so we were pleased to support a workshop for Pacific States organized by OCHA in June. That workshop successfully raised awareness of global initiatives relating to conflict and improved understanding by those States of their responsibilities and obligations under international law.

We welcome the steps taken by the United Nations over the past year to enhance the protection of

women and children and to prevent their sexual exploitation and abuse. Let us also recognize the capacities of women as effective agents for preventing conflict, rather than just focus on their vulnerabilities.

More generally, we think that aid programmes are well placed to address many of the root causes of conflict and instability and to support durable solutions for those affected. In Australia's case, a specific policy on peace, conflict and development guides our approach and defines the aid programme's role — within broader Government efforts — in preventing, managing and reducing conflict, building peace and assisting post-conflict recovery.

Australia endorsed the conclusions of the June meeting in Stockholm on good humanitarian donorship, and we will seek to apply those principles and good practices within the overall policies set for our aid programme.

Over the past 12 months Australia has responded to many calls for humanitarian assistance, not only in the Asia-Pacific region but also beyond it. Several responses deserve particular mention.

In Solomon Islands, Australia, working with New Zealand and other Pacific Island Forum partners, intervened, at the invitation of the Government of Solomon Islands, to restore law and order. The humanitarian dimension of the intervention is aimed at assisting people displaced through conflict, ethnic tension and the breakdown of law and order. Australia is providing an additional economic assistance package of 25 million Australian dollars for Solomon Islands.

In Timor-Leste, since 2000, Australia has provided A$ 150 million in reconstruction and development assistance, targeting key sectors such as governance, water supply and sanitation, food security and income generation for rural communities, health and education. Australia is also providing A$ 1 million to the World Food Programme (WFP) appeal for emergency food aid assistance. We commend the re-establishment of the World Food Programme in Timor-Leste as an important step in the ongoing monitoring of food security and enhanced capacity-building for Timor-Leste. We encourage further long-term involvement with the broader donor community in the WFP's endeavours.

Australia has committed more than A$ 100 million to the humanitarian and reconstruction needs of the Iraqi people. Australia provided prompt assistance to key international humanitarian agencies in their preparations and early support to the United Nations Flash Appeal and associated agencies, including a commitment of A$ 6 million to the Central Emergency Revolving Fund, provision of water supply and sanitation services, disease prevention and treatment programmes, food distribution, provision of child protection services, and the clearance of mines and unexploded ordnance.

Although Australia's aid programme is focused primarily on our region — the Asia Pacific — we remain committed to helping to meet humanitarian needs across the globe. As part of its global commitment, Australia continues to support the needs of Palestinian communities affected by the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, providing almost A$ 3.5 million in humanitarian assistance through United Nations agencies in 2002-2003. Such assistance includes contributions to food aid, food security and psychosocial programmes, and has been delivered primarily through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the World Food Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Finally, let me record Australia's appreciation for the efforts of the former Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Kenzo Oshima. We were pleased to host Mr. Oshima in Australia last year for the launch of the 2003 United Nations Inter-Agency Consolidated Appeals. We look forward to working with his successor, Mr. Jan Egeland. Australia will continue to engage strongly with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other effective agencies in order to improve the impact and quality of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance.

**Mr. Radhakrishnam** (India): We thank the Secretary- General for the reports which have been prepared on "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance". We associate ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 on this agenda item.

Recent events have clearly demonstrated the fact that the United Nations cannot fulfil the role expected

of it in the field of humanitarian assistance if the safety and security of its personnel is not ensured. Sergio Vieira de Mello and his colleagues, who laid down their lives in the terrorist attacks against United Nations headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August, served in the finest tradition of the international civil service as represented by the United Nations. The deliberate targeting of United Nations personnel involved in the pursuit of peace makes this incident all the more tragic.

The report before us (A/58/89) has enhanced our understanding of key issues which merit consideration by the General Assembly, particularly those relating to humanitarian financing and the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. The report points out that there has been a doubling of overall levels of humanitarian aid since 1990. This is, indeed, most heartening. It is, however, a matter of concern that this increase in humanitarian assistance has been accompanied by an overall decline in flows of official development assistance.

The Secretary-General has, in another report, referred to humanitarian assistance's crowding out the resources required for development. The Economic and Social Council this year reiterated that humanitarian assistance should be provided in a way that is not to the detriment of resources made available for development cooperation. It is important to ensure this, as it is development assistance which, in the long term, reduces the need for emergency humanitarian assistance.

The Secretary-General's report draws attention to the fact that donor decisions to allocate resources are not driven primarily by objective needs but more by domestic considerations, traditional patterns of expenditure and geopolitical interests. The largest shortfalls in responses to the consolidated appeals process, reaching more than 70 per cent, are faced by the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. That pattern goes against the basic tenets of humanitarian assistance as contained in General Assembly resolution 46/182.

The Economic and Social Council has, in response to that trend, encouraged the donor community to provide humanitarian assistance in proportion to needs and on the basis of need assessments, with a view to ensuring a more equitable distribution of assistance across humanitarian emergencies, including those of a protracted nature. We hope that the Council's call will be heeded.

The report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/58/434, which focuses on natural disasters, has attempted, for the first time, also to provide information on funding trends for natural-disaster responses. We commend the Secretariat for its efforts, even though the information provided is somewhat sketchy. We understand that this is because of definitional problems and a lack of consistency with regard to the bases on which information is compiled. This issue needs to be addressed, as the absence of comprehensive and precise information affects our understanding of an issue to which the international community attaches great importance.

We understand that the Secretariat has set up a joint working group to review a range of United Nations responses in post-conflict transition situations. Our attention has been drawn to the recommendations of that group, which are contained in the Secretary-General's report on the reform of the Organization. We note that the working group attached importance to the facilitation of links among the political, peacekeeping and operational wings of the United Nations and to addressing the variance in mandates for different United Nations offices at a given location.

That recommendation seems to be based on the premise that the response of the United Nations cannot be effective if it is fragmented and that, therefore, the various entities dealing with human rights, security, humanitarian assistance and development should deliver an integrated response. The recommendations of the working group also call for strengthening the efforts of the United Nations in the areas of advocacy and negotiation.

We have always highlighted the risks associated with such an approach. Life-saving humanitarian assistance must be provided on the basis of the principles of neutrality, humanity and impartiality. Such assistance should never be used as a bargaining tool by those dealing with political issues, though the promotion and protection of human rights is undoubtedly important. However, if humanitarian workers were to do so, they would be politicizing their actions and compromising their access to those in need. Similarly, development assistance provided by the United Nations needs to respect the principles of neutrality and country-driven programming. In the post-conflict scenario, affected Governments may not be best placed to assert their own priorities. The United Nations, therefore, needs to provide assistance for

capacity-building; it should not attempt to take advantage of the situation through bypassing the national Government.

The mandates of peacekeeping operations also need to be defined in a manner that does not result in their being seen as partial. The last regular session of the Economic and Social Council has provided legislative guidance in this regard through its resolution which, inter alia, affirms the leading role of civilian organizations in implementing humanitarian assistance. It also affirms the need, in situations where military capacity and assets have to be used to support the implementation of humanitarian assistance, to ensure that such use is strictly in conformity with humanitarian principles.

We note that transition situations particularly attract the attention of both the Secretariat and the donor countries. To be concerned about bridging the gap between relief and development and to provide emergency assistance in ways that are supportive of recovery and long-term development is laudable. The tendency to see transition situations as opportunities to fundamentally transform social mores, recast economic priorities and influence political dynamics is, however, most regrettable. If it collaborates with such efforts, the United Nations will run the risk of jeopardizing its status as a trusted partner of the developing countries.

The arguments which we have outlined for clearly respecting the differences in the United Nations roles in peacekeeping, the protection and promotion of human rights, the fostering of economic and social development and the coordination of humanitarian assistance also provide a reason for approaching with caution and circumspection any integrated plan for the fulfilment of these objectives, for example, through a form of economic and social security council.

The General Assembly has outlined the Guiding Principles of humanitarian assistance in the annex of its resolution 46/182, adopted in 1991. While coordinated and intrusive approaches may seem more attractive, the efforts of the Secretariat in the field of humanitarian assistance will be assessed by us in terms of the benchmarks provided by this resolution.

*The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.*